

DLP BRIEFING NOTE 157

Prepared by
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Introduction

This briefing note has been prepared following the publication of The Solar PV Strategy 'Part 2 document' on the 4th April 2014 by the Department of Energy and Climate Change. The document sets out the Governments guiding principles for deployment of solar photovoltaic panels in the UK in the wider pursuit of reducing carbon emissions. Through this publication the Government is seeking to narrow its focus toward the deployment of small to mid-scale projects across various industries including commercial, industrial and larger public buildings with a concentration on rooftop deployment.

DLP Planning Consultants have extensive experience in dealing with large scale solar installations, acting on behalf of numerous established solar service providers with varying levels of involvement ranging from initial land identification through to planning application submission and discharge of conditions processes.

What does the strategy say?

The document states that the stronger than anticipated deployment of large-scale solar farms has and will continue to have implications for the financial support framework for the whole PV sector, which is constrained under the Levy Control Framework. The Governments current ambition is to maintain the current dominant sector of small-scale roof-top projects whilst maximising the potential of the as yet little tapped mid-size projects on commercial and industrial rooftops.

The document concentrates in the main on two distinct sectors in a step change for the deployment of Solar PV through to 2020:

- (a) PV at a smaller scale (typically smaller than 4kWp, but up to 50kWp) on and in housing, small commercial premises and community buildings; and
- (b) Increasing significantly mid-size deployment (larger than 50kWp and up to 1MWp), particularly on commercial and industrial buildings also on larger public and community buildings as well as ground mounted PV.

With regards to how this will affect future applications for large scale ground mounted solar and the need to adapt planning submissions for large-scale renewables, the key points of action from this document are summarised below:

Design, Layout and Scale

DECC are to promote DCLG's planning guidance on large-scale solar farms. The guidance will set out particular considerations for solar farms, such as their visual impact, and underline the importance of planning concerns of local communities are given due consideration. The strategy acknowledges that large-scale ground mounted solar farms have attracted opposition due to concerns over changes in land use and cumulative impact, particularly on agricultural land. Furthermore the deployments of large scale ground mounted PV can have impacts on visual amenity, and matters of siting and design are therefore important.

The development of larger ground-mounted solar PV has increased both in terms of the installed capacity, the number of installations and the typical size of installations. The strategy acknowledges opportunities for greater generation but raises concerns over the potential negative impact upon the rural environment of poorly that lack local engagement.

As a consequence the Solar Trade Association has developed a statement of “**10 Commitments**”, which are set out below and will **develop guidance on design and installation of PV to encourage better design that is more visually attractive in local areas.** In addition to this the National Solar Centre will publish best practice guides on the development of large-scale solar farms. The first of these documents will focus on the factors that developers should consider in the design and installation of large-scale solar farms. The second will form a guide to enhancing the biodiversity benefits from the ground-mounted solar PV. This will in the future lead to the development of a “Code of Best Practise for Aesthetics of deployed PV”.

- 1. We will focus on non-agricultural land or land which is of lower agricultural quality;*
- 2. We will be sensitive to nationally and locally protected landscapes and nature conservation areas, and we welcome opportunities to enhance the ecological value of the land;*
- 3. We will minimise visual impact where possible and maintain appropriate screening throughout the lifetime of the project managed through a Land Management and/or Ecology plan;*
- 4. We will engage with the community in advance of submitting a planning application;*
- 5. We will encourage land diversification by proposing continued agricultural use or incorporating biodiversity measures within our projects;*
- 6. We will do as much buying and employing locally as possible;*
- 7. We will act considerately during construction, and demonstrate ‘solar stewardship’ of the land for the lifetime of the project;*
- 8. We will seek the support of the local community and listen to their views and suggestions;*
- 9. We commit to using the solar farm as an educational opportunity, where appropriate;*
- 10. The end of the project life we will return the land to its former use.*

The above commitments form best practice initiatives and will be important in addressing the perception that solar farms are diverting significant amounts of land from agricultural use and domestic food production. In addition development proposals will need to address the effects on the landscape and communities by satisfying each objective as part of any planning application.

Decisions on granting approval of large-scale solar PV installations (less than 50MWp) will continue to be taken through the local planning processes in accordance with development plans, and relevant material planning considerations, including the NPPF (The Framework) and national guidance (Planning Practice Guidance).

DLP Planning Consultants has considerable knowledge of the national planning system and the renewable energy sector with extensive experience in large scale ground mounted solar PV. Senior staff within the practice would be very happy to explain the Part 2 Strategy and its particular implication for you. If you wish to utilise DLP’s considerable planning expertise to represent you for future solar PV development, please don’t hesitate to contact Senior Staff members to discuss your requirements.

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briefing

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